

NOTICIAS del PUERTO de MONTEREY

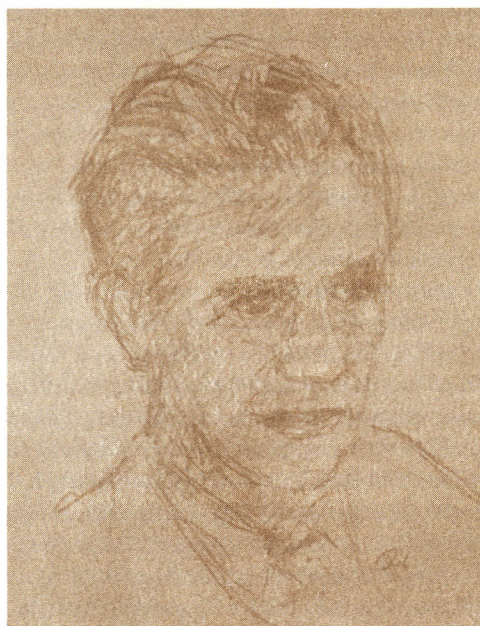
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Francis Palms
1910-1982

Old Monterey has had many friends—people of talent, energy and devotion—willing to work for the preservation of the past. And, as the pages of NOTICIAS attest, some have gone on to join that past, leaving behind them a solid legacy for future generations.

One who labored long and hard for urban rescue was the architect Francis Palms. Since he dealt with a number of projects over a period of years it seems remarkably fitting that the last should have been the re-routing of the Path of History which guides sightseers to old landmarks in a changing city and the design of new signs identifying those landmarks.

Palms, who graduated from Williams College Architectural School in 1933, opened his own practice in Falls Church, Virginia in 1939. There, and in nearby Washington,

houses of the Federal period were a natural part of an architect's work, something which may have prepared him for the blend of Anglo-American and hispanic styles known as Monterey Colonial.

When he moved to the Peninsula in 1952, following government and naval service during World War II, a period of growth in California was commencing. Very naturally his interests as an architect and concerned citizen were now directed toward both development and preservation. This led to membership in a number of community organizations, among them the History and Art Association, Monterey Commission on City Appearance, Monterey Urban Renewal Plan Review Committee, Monterey Museum Board, Monterey Citizens Advisory Committee, and National Trust for Historic Preservation.

In 1963 Palms and Constance Clampett Flavin, the enchanting actress some of us remember in the early First Theater productions, were married and settled down in one of Monterey's most interesting old homes—Gordon House, just behind Colton Hall. His architectural office was in a building next door. It was the perfect situation for a couple with mutual tastes for both present and past. There they lived, worked, and entertained until his death.

Connie Palms and I are old friends, and when I went to see her in the bright rooms filled with memorabilia the talk naturally turned to things Francis had done—music, painting, some writing; art exhibits in the United States, Italy and Japan; architectural projects all over the country; and, above all, what he had envisioned for Monterey.

He felt that development and preservation should work together in a touristically oriented historic town. It is a practical outlook but, unfortunately, one sometimes ignored in the developmental process—thus he often suffered frustrating disappointments while acting as an urban renewal consultant.

The second category was more satisfactory—he was able to work directly on the repair and restoration of Colton Hall, whose Palladian-inspired facade may have been reminiscent of houses back in Virginia; the restoration of the Rodriguez-Osio adobe (now the Chamber of Commerce) on the Alvarado Street Mall, which presented some problems due to changes in street level; the old French Consulate building near El Estero; modifications on his own home; and the restoration of Capitular Hall on the corner of Franklin and Pierce Streets, particularly interesting in that a large part of the building is new construction, conforming admirably with indigenous architecture.

In general practice Palms had an eclectic approach, employing a number of different styles over a period of years, but his feeling for Monterey as a place valued by both inhabitants and visitors was special. The transmutation of the past into something usable for the future became almost as important as restoration itself. His last completed set of drawings was for a lawyer's office building in the hispanic style. When this is finished it will be a worthy new arrival on the Path of History and a fitting legacy from a man who loved a town both wisely and well.

Betty Patchin Greene

WOMEN OF THE ADOBES

(continued from June)

Fascinated by accounts of early California women and their way of life, one is drawn again and again to sources about an historical era we proudly celebrate. In its decades, scarcity of amenities was offset by abundant hospitality. Love of finery for self and home defied austerities. The small "gente de razon" population linked itself in vibrant family relationships proud and strong in political and physical dangers. Rigid decorum and conventions accepted as proper and normal were relieved by an unequalled capacity to enjoy festivities when they were in order. Ah, yes, but—

Early adobe homes, in contrast to those now enjoyed in restored elegance, began with 2 or 3 damp, unheated, dirt-floored rooms. Casa Boronda, built in 1817, was the oldest house in Monterey and perhaps the oldest adobe in California. Its original 3 rooms had a roof thatched with tules tied with rawhide thongs. Yet the thick walls of the bricks introduced by mission padres proved uniquely suited for the climate and both durable and livable when later combined with redwood. Rooms were added as needed, wooden doors installed, as well as window glass and tiled roofs. Casa de Estaban Munras, built in 1824, was one of the first "pretentious" homes in Monterey, with its 2 stories, tile roof, and one of the first fireplaces in California. Smuggling in early years, then open trade brought coveted niceties of life: sofas, chairs, proper beds, china—even 3 pianos came round the Horn in 1843.

Alfred Robinson described the house and hospitality of Don Manuel Domingues in San Diego: "... though its coarse mud walls and damp ground did not altogether coincide with the idea I had previously formed of it, yet if their walls were cold and their floors damp, their hearts were warm and the abundance of their luxurious entertainment more than compensated for any disappointment."

And if John Ross Brown in 1849 wrote unenthusiastically of Senor Soberances' ranch that it was "... a miserable hut, full of lice, fleas, and everything except furniture," most travelers remembered the graciousness of many homes—de la Guerra, Jimeno, Larkin. The latter's building innovations changed the character of adobes. His original one-story home was re-built in 1834 with a second story, using redwood for framing and rafters, and had broad pine flooring and furnishing of "down east" style carpets, furniture, mirrors, and paintings. The house which cost \$5000 was not only a residence, but after 1846, the "de facto" capitol in California.

The responsibilities of the large households under the mistresses of the adobes were demanding. Early on the Indian women servants were trained and supervised to pound grains, bake bread in huge outdoor ovens, roast and grind coffee, dress fowl, scour huge wooden family washtubs, make candles, weave, and sew. Senora Vallejo, who had 16 children, said each had a personal attendant, she had 2, 4 or 5 servants ground corn, 6 or 7 were in the kitchen, up to 6 washed clothes, and 12 were constantly spinning and sewing. Although unpaid, servants were "treated as friends."

On the grim side of life were diseases little understood and for which there were only herbal medicines and no qualified physicians; endless childbearing; agonizing infant mortality. Innoculation by cowpox in 1806 and vaccination in 1817 are recorded, but in 1844 a smallpox epidemic hit Monterey. Although worst for Indians, it was of sufficient concern to settlers that a Board of Trustees was appointed to set up a hospital, operated by 2 nurses and a man to bury the dead. Frequency of births and deaths in families made it difficult at times to sort out who actually constituted the family.

Another aspect of adobe life—not life threatening, it is true, but monumental in its

way—were fleas: to say that they were endemic in California understates their daily and indiscriminate torment to everyone. While ignored by most native writers, the unrelenting discomfort from fleas occasioned many an observer's outburst, and resulted in no less than an extensive bibliography, *The Flea in California History and Literature, 1769-1878*, with testimony from Padre Crespi's time on and including that of Bayard Taylor, Walter Colton, Carl Meyer, Alfred Robinson, and others. Robinson en route to Monterey, wrote of a stop-over at San Juan Bautista: "I could not sleep . . . at times it would seem as if a thousand needles penetrated my legs and sides . . . They were fleas indeed! and it appeared to me as if they came in armies to glut their appetites with human blood . . . The whole tedious night was passed in scratching and complaining till morning broke . . . The whole country is infested with fleas, and it a rare thing to find a house without them, so that the natives have become accustomed to their bite, and think nothing of it."

In 1846 Walter Colton wrote: "The trouble of young and old here is the flea . . . He jumps into your cradle, jumps with you all along through life and well would it be for those who remain if he jumped with you out of it." Carl Meyer, a '49er staying at Hartnell's country place, said: "Night on a California or Mexican rancho brings something unpleasant . . . about which not a word would be said if its course were not generally known in the country and if it were not an endemic evil: it is what one might call "Flea Fever"; hardly has one gone to bed when a whole band of these small devilish fleas pursue their bloody maneuvers on one's sensitive skin driving away sleep and torturing a man to madness . . . Daytime they persist and "certain gestures" go on unhesitatingly during conversations."

What matter, indeed, when there were weddings, baptisms, house blessings, pre-Lenten festivities, bull fights, horse races, and frequent house guests—all occasions for music, meriendas, fandangos, with all the dances: contra-dances, waltzes, quadrilles, *el son*, *el jarabe*, and ancient *jota*. Robinson described the meriendas, universal favorites. Oxen-pulled arched *carretas* covered with cotton carried the host family; soft hide-lined carts had children, servants, and friends; and finally followed one cart squeaking under enormous weights or turkey, chicken, beef, mutton, tamales, *dulces*, etc. Carts and people on horseback would reach a grassy knoll by a pond or overlooking the sea. Large white tableclothes would be spread and the feast laid out. Hours of conviviality, good wine, walks and games with the children, guitar music and singing, would be followed by rest until sundown. The siesta having ended, music and dancing began and continued at home throughout the night. Black coffee and tortillas for early breakfast would send guests happily on their way in the morning.

Women were eager spectators at races, bull fights, and bear and bull baiting. Robinson described California bull fights as very different from the "brutal exhibitions" of Spain and Mexico, being more an exhibition of skilled equestrian performance. Alas, one finds nothing to mitigate the torturous bull and bear baiting practices!

Although Ana Beque Packman (*Noticias*, Dec. 1981) wrote in her book of the practical way in which women of early California adapted native foods to their accustomed ones, the Englishman, Sir George Simpson, writing of a breakfast with the Vallejos in 1841, objected: "In front of Mr. Lesse (Vallejo's brother-in-law) . . . was placed an array of 5 dishes, 2 kinds of stewed beef, rice, fowls, and beans. As all the cooking is done in outhouses—for the dwellings . . . have no chimneys or fireplaces—the dishes were by no means too hot . . . while being served . . . to a party of about 20 people, they became each colder than the other, before they reached their destinations." He complained that everything had " . . . literally been seethed into chips . . . and every

mouthful poisoned with the everlasting compound of pepper and garlick . . . elsewhere we more than once saw, in one and the same dish, beef, and tongue, and pumpkin, and garlick, and potatoes in their jackets, and cabbage, and onions and tomata, and pepper and Heaven knows what besides . . . When to the foregoing sketch are added bad tea and worse wine, the reader has picked up a perfect idea of Californian breakfast, Californian dinner, and Californian supper . . ." His was surely a minority voice!

Angustias de la Guerra said parties, dances, and country trips were continuously given in Monterey, and in Sr. Alvarado's time, not by his use of public funds, as alleged, but "by us ladies and cost little or nothing." While rivalry of attire was keen at home and parties, when silks, velvets, and laces were brought out, dress for church was the same for women of all ranks: black chemises of cheap material and rebozos wrapped around the head and draped over the shoulders. Brigida Briones wrote that in 1829 ladies were rarely seen on Monterey streets except attended by servants, on their way to early morning mass. Because there were no seats in church and floors were hard, cold, and damp, women carried in rugs they had embroidered to kneel on.

Parental authority was unlimited even after children married and had children. Implicit obedience and respect prevailed. Sons stood, removed hats, and never smoked in the presence of parents. Young couples, even when engaged, scarcely spoke or saw one another alone. William Heath Davis testified this was true of his 2-year long engagement.

Angustias' father, Don Jose, was a strict disciplinarian, insisting on a family schedule that began at sunrise, included punctual meals, teatime, and prayers, with his 4 daughters standing dutifully while he was seated. All townspeople venerated Don Jose, men respectfully removing their hats even when passing his house. Angustias in later years disapproved of what she saw as increasingly relaxed discipline as Indians were accorded freedoms and rights.

Davis was impressed by how "exceedingly neat and clean the women were in their houses, domestic arrangements, and personally. One of their "peculiarities," he noted, was the excellence, often elegance, and neatness of their beds, which were often highly and tastefully ornamented. He acknowledged that California men were generally good husbands and temperate but "the women, married or unmarried, of all classes were the most virtuous I have ever seen . . . brighter, quicker in their perceptions and generally smarter than the men."

Yet many settlers had limited educations. Outside the missions, the zeal of the padres to teach Indians did not extend to settlers, and much had to be learned within the family. The few early private schools, for boys only, were not very successful, limited by a scarcity of books and good teachers. (Notable exceptions were Rev. Willey, Mary Eager, Florencio Serrano, and Mrs. Isbell). Mothers, like Prudenciana Amesti who had girls, taught them in their homes. Imagine their delight when, in 1849, 3 Dominican nuns arrived from the East and began teaching girls in a building of William Hartnell's. The next year their schooling continued in St. Catherine's Convent, the first in Old California. It was housed next to Don Manuel Jimeno's home, in a building which he had built to be a hotel, on the site of the now doomed San Carlos Hotel garage. In 1851 the Convent became the first formal school for girls in the new state, but remained in Monterey only 3 years before moving to Benicia. Torn down long ago, (its adobes, according to Laura Bride Powers, having been used to repair Monterey Streets), the Convent is remembered as the refuge of Dona Maria Concepcion Arguello after her unhappy romance with Nicolas Resanof. Concepcion, known for years as *La Beata*, petitioned at age 60 to become a novice at St. Catherine's, took the veil there, and taught in the school.

Dearth of good education in Hispanic California was of concern to other leaders. In the 1830's Hartnell opened his Seminario de San Jose in Monterey, later moving the school, which was for boys only, to Alisal Ranch. In 1846 General Vallejo expressed his hope that California would soon have establishments with capable professors "to dissipate the dense darkness in which we have lain dormant until now." The same year Larkin recommended to Commodore Sloat that a schoolmaster be appointed. A proper school was built and a Board of Trustees appointed to preserve and extend the accommodations "in conformity with the general wish of the citizens."

Testimony of the beauty, hospitality, and feminine skills of adobe donas is matched by stories of their bravery and resourcefulness. Needless to say, all were superb horsewomen and usually skilled with muskets which they kept handy at all times. Angustias de la Guerra, at age 15, smuggled messages from her father to his friend, Padre Martinez who was incarcerated in prison and later banished by Comandante General Escheandia for alleged conspiracy to return California to Spain. A few years later, about 1836, Angustias, on her father's behalf, went to the Mission in Santa Barbara, ostensibly to have breakfast with her brother-in-law Padre Jose Jimeno, but actually to warn Padre Duran, under accusation for an incident of his padres involving Governor Chico, that he was to be arrested and sent away. When deputies did come to take the Padre, it was women of the pueblo, with whom Duran was popular, who thwarted the arrest: they surrounded the cart carrying him, some took up sticks to do battle, they raised a great hue and cry, whereupon padres and others joined them declaring that "what the women wanted had to be done." They prevailed and took the padre back to the Mission.

In 1842, when U.S. Commodore Thomas Catesby Jones hoisted the Stars and Stripes over Monterey mistakenly believing there was war with Mexico, he sent his secretary to seize the Custom House keys from Angustias, knowing that her brother, Pablo de la Guerra, Administrator of Customs, lived with her. Angustias refused to deliver the key, saying she did not have it. The secretary threatened to knock the Custom House door down, to which she replied "he could do as he pleased." He didn't.

Angustias had firsthand knowledge of several unpleasant incidents about 1843, when soldiers of General Micheltorena committed crimes on the citizenry, including robbing her house. (The General himself she defended, believing him to be "dominated by goodness and incapable of wronging anyone but not suited for chief and surrounded by insufficient troops.")

Some historians have attributed to Angustias a hatred of Americans, although she married Dr. Ord in the 1850's. There is the story that she wept when Commodore Sloat took Monterey, and pregnant at the time, she spread the colors of Mexico over her bed, vowing her child would not be born under the Yankee flag. It is told that she exclaimed she would delight to have the ears of the officers of the U.S. squadron for a necklace. (The subject of Gertrude Atherton's short story, "The Ears of Twenty Americans", which also incorporates the story of Angustias' daughter's death from eating an orange after childbirth.) Witty, vivacious, and entertaining in her conversation, Angustias was heard by Davis to express "utter approbation" in the most "sarcastic manner" of the change in government, but "she was so intelligent and her manner so captivating that the listener was overcome with admiration of her brightness and the pungency and appropriateness of her speech." She speaks best for herself, when remembering July 7, 1846, she said: "The conquest of California did not bother the Californians, least of all the women. It must be confessed that California was on the road to the most complete ruin. On the one hand the Indians were out of hand, committing robberies, and other

crimes on the ranches, with little or nothing being done to curb their depredations. On the other hand were the differences between the people of the north and of the south, and between both against the Mexicans and other bands. But the worst cancer of all was the plundering which was carried on generally. There had been such looting of the resources of the government, that the treasury chest was "scuttled". General Castro maintained a corps of officers sufficient for an army of 3,000 men; all, good or bad, drew their salaries, more to satisfy their partisans. Of these officers, few offered their services when the hour came to defend the country against foreign invasion. The greater part performed no more service than the figurehead of a ship."

Even so, Angustias did not hesitate to defy the Americans after their occupation in 1846, when a fight erupted between them and a group of Californians at La Natividad. A Mexican, Chavez (supposed son of Governor Figueroa) hid in Monterey after the battle and was wounded when pursued in flight. He sought refuge with Angustias. Her husband was away, and she had just given birth to a daughter, but already incensed by unjust imprisonment of her two brothers, she devised a plan to help Chavez. He was smuggled into her house on the shoulders of another short man, the two appearing as one tall person under a Spanish shawl and felt hat. Chavez hid for 2 days, then Americans came at night to search. Warned in time, Chavez was hidden under a pile of blankets in a garden corner, and Angustias put her sleeping new baby on top of the pile. The rest of the household retired while officers searched for hours. Her story continues: "Finally, the lieutenant and his people came into my bedroom without saying a word. He had a pistol in one hand and a candle in the other. He looked under my bed but found nothing. Then he came near me holding the pistol and candle to my face and said that he was hunting for a man who was said to be hidden in my house. I asked him if he had found him, and he said he had not. It pleased me greatly because I had not told them any lies!" When he pretended to be tired and wanted to sit down, she told him no one could rest in her room who was not a member of her family or a friend. He and the others left. Two days later Chavez, disguised as a woman, got away to Santa Barbara.

With this story, Mrs. Ord ended her narrative, *Ocurrencias en California*, dictated to Thomas Savage in 1878. And we conclude our short look at the era of adobe women for which Angustias de la Guerra Ord left a strong and colorful representation.

D.T.

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